



Health for Performing Artists

Maximising your potential

For many young performing artists, that long-awaited first contract coincides with many other firsts: living away from home; managing cooking, laundry and household duties; balancing work, rest and social life; travel and touring; self-care for minor illnesses; managing and seeking appropriate help for ill-health and injuries; home-sickness; and maintaining self-confidence without the daily support of long-time friends and close family members. Temptations may be harder to resist when you are trying to fit in with other cast members. When things start to go off track, it is important to know how to look after yourself.

To ensure a long and fulfilling career, be active in maximising your potential and in seeking help before problems start to impact on your work, your health, or your personal happiness. Natural potential and hard work are not enough—you need to be resourceful to achieve and then maintain a rewarding career. Key components are your physical health and your mental health.

Health

When discussing health, “mind” and “body” should not be considered separately. The physical and mental aspects of health are strongly interdependent, with the condition of one affecting the other. Poor mental health can lead to physical illness, and poor physical health can increase the risk of mental health conditions. Both mental and physical health can be influenced by lifestyle factors, including:

- **Exercise:** Even low intensity exercise, or short bursts of physical activity, have a positive effect on the chemicals in your brain, making you feel more alert, energetic and positive. Exercise also increases resistance to injury and illness.
- **Nutrition:** Your diet has a crucial effect on your physical and mental health, and your ability to meet the physical and mental challenges of a performer’s life. Good nutrition can help prevent and manage many mental illnesses, including depression. Fast food or “comfort food” may be enticing after a heavy day of rehearsal or performance, but a healthy meal or snack is more likely to help your mental and physical capability the next day.
- **Sleep:** Sufficient good quality sleep is essential for both mental and physical aspects of optimal performance.
- **Smoking:** Mental and physical health can both be seriously damaged by the chemicals released into our brains and blood streams during smoking.

Physical health

Coping with the many pressures of life within the performing arts requires good physical health, but ensuring your diet, sleep, and exercise routines meet the specific demands of your work is challenging. You also need time for relaxation and social activities within the constraints of a performing life. However, all these are essential for optimal performance. Additional advice can be found in ASPAAH guides such as *Sleep for high performance*, *Fatigue and recovery*, and *Cross-training*.

Mental health

Mental health describes your psychological and emotional wellbeing. If you can cope with normal day-to-day stresses; can work productively and realise your potential; and can generally contribute to the world around you; your mental health is good. Most of us have periods when our mental health is not as good as we would wish, but there are a range of health professionals and organisations who can help. You can start by visiting your General Practitioner (GP) who can plan appointments with a range of professionals in the public or the private system. In addition, public hospitals and the organisations listed on the next page offer appointments, telephone helplines and online chat facilities, with most free of charge. By actively caring for your mental health, you give yourself the best chance of fulfilling your potential and enjoying your life as a performing artist.



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Wellbeing

Although definitions of wellbeing vary, the basic elements are generally accepted as mental, social and physical health. For more information on the mental and social aspects of wellbeing, see the ASPAH Guide “Psychological wellbeing in the performing arts”.

If you are experiencing thoughts of self-harm or suicide, ring the Suicide Callback Service (1300 659 467) or Lifeline (13 11 14) without delay.

Sexual health

You can obtain **24-hour online support through Health Direct on 1800 022 222**, and find clinics in your area through www.healthdirect.gov.au/sexual-health. Sites such as this also include information on contraception options, fertility, male and female sexual problems, and sexually transmitted infections (testing, advice and support). Several government sites also offer health apps.

Most public hospitals and many general practitioners offer free sexual health support. Do not hesitate to seek help for any sexual health concerns. Early intervention can avoid unnecessary worry and avoid more serious problems.

LGBTI health

QLife (1800 184 527) is Australia’s first national counselling and referral service for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and/or intersex (LGBTI). QLife provides anonymous and free LGBTI peer support and referral for people wanting to talk about sexuality, identity, gender, bodies, feelings or relationships. Webchat and telephone support are available between 3pm and midnight. Outside these hours, QLife recommends **Lifeline (13 11 14)** or **Kids Helpline for under 25s (1800 55 1800)**.

Factors that can reduce your health, wellbeing and performance

Substance abuse

Substance misuse and substance abuse include the harmful use of drugs (illicit, prescription or over-the-counter), alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, and volatile substances (e.g. petrol, glue, paint).

Addiction

Addiction refers to a physical and/or psychological need to use a substance, often caused by regular continued use. Mental, physical and lifestyle factors make some people more likely to become addicted to a substance.

Help for substance abuse and addiction

Lifeline (13 11 14) offers confidential phone, chat and online support for any aspect of substance abuse or addiction.

If you fear you may have put your life in danger, call 000 immediately.



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Websites offering advice and support

Ambulance, emergency or crisis: T: 000 (be ready to say whether you need police, ambulance or fire services)

Beyond Blue – anxiety, depression, loneliness, suicide prevention, LGBTI: www.beyondblue.org.au/; T: 1300 22 4636

Butterfly Foundation – eating disorders: support@thebutterflyfoundation.org.au; T: 1800 33 4673

Kids Helpline – for under 25s, any time, any reason: <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>; T: 1800 55 1800

Lifeline – crisis support, suicide prevention: www.lifeline.org.au; T: 13 11 14

Mental and physical health: www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/p/physical-health-and-mental-health

Mental health support: www.healthdirect.gov.au/community-mental-health-services; <https://headspace.org.au/>;

QLife – LGBTI support: <https://qlife.org.au/>; T: 1800 184 527

Sexual health – safe sex, STIs, testing, contraception: www.healthdirect.gov.au/sexual-health

Substance abuse and addiction: www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/topics/substance-abuse-and-addiction; T: 13 11 14

Suicide Callback Service – crisis support: www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au/; T: 1300 659 467

World Health Organisation – general information on health: www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/

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